

Walk Wisely by the Spirit-Kids and Work

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[0 : 0 0] Now, I don't know about whether you've heard or not, but there is actually a brand new TV show coming to Channel 9 in two weeks' time. It's called Parental Guidance.

And it's advertised on the Channel 9 website as 9's groundbreaking new series. And it also says that every Australian parent will be comparing their parenting styles and asking if their methods are right.

How are they going to do this? Well, they're taking 10 sets of parents, all with different parenting styles, and they are pitting them against each other and judging them to make good TV.

And so is this where we should be going for wisdom about how to raise our kids or grandkids, nieces and nephews? Well, today we come to the Bible's wisdom, which I'm assuming you know is a better place to look.

And we come to the topics of kids and work, which I thought was quite apt, given that kids can be work. But first, let me remind you of where we're at, since this week follows closely from last week.

[1 : 1 9] Last week, we saw that we're to walk wisely and be filled by the Spirit. And being filled by the Spirit will lead us, as you can see, to different things like speaking to one another, singing, making music, giving thanks to God the Father, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Now, we looked at some of those examples of submitting at church, where we voluntarily submit to one another, depending on our role, whether a welcomeer or morning tea person or service leader and so on.

And then, as I said last week, it's as though Paul, to use computer language, you know, double clicks on verse 21, and up pops these three examples of submission in household roles.

We did the first one last week and saw how husbands are to use their headship to sacrificially serve for their wife's good. And wives are to submit and let them.

I use the example of a husband saying to his wife, look, I'll do the dishes, you go and relax. And then she submits by saying, OK, you do the dishes, I'll go and relax.

[2 : 3 6] Or the husband may obey his wife because he knows that's for her good. But sometimes it may mean the husband saying, for example, look, I'm worried about your health.

Please go and see a doctor. And then the wife submits, even though she thinks I don't really need to see a doctor, but she knows he's doing it for her good. Now, it's not normally that overt.

Most marriages simply develop patterns that work for the couple, depending on their stage of life. But however it works out, the husband needs to make sure the pattern serves his wife's good.

And from time to time, the wife may need to overtly submit to let him serve her for her good. But that was last week. Today, we come to the next two examples of household submission, children and the domestic slaves.

And even if you're not in these situations, in fact, none of us are slaves today, are we? And so there's going to be a little bit of difference for us. But even if we're not in those situations, there's still application for us.

[3 : 42] So point one, verse one. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. And notice here that Paul addresses children as though they are members of the church.

This letter was read out to the churches around Ephesus. And he tells them to obey in the Lord. That is, as a Christian.

And so, as I said, he's treating kids as Christians, which is partly why I think infant baptism is okay, since you raise your kids as Christians.

But I'm not going to get into that topic anymore. Notice, though, also, that Paul doesn't tell kids to voluntarily submit, but to just straight out obey, which is stronger.

As I said last week, to submit means to voluntarily submit yourselves as independent, free adults, like to the welcomer or to the service leader or to the morning tea person and so on.

[4 : 50] But children are not independent adults, are they? No, they're dependent kids. And so it's not voluntarily submit. I mean, they don't know enough to know what's good and what's right and so on, though they just have to straight out obey because, verse one, this is right.

And, verse two, for their good. Have a look at verse two. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, so it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life in the land.

Here, Paul reapplies the fifth commandment that we heard in our first reading. And he says children are not just to obey, but also to honor their parents.

You see, it is possible for a child to obey and dishonor at the same time. I mean, imagine a child gets in trouble and they have to go to their room.

And so they obey and go. But as they go, they slam doors or mutter rude words to their parents. I'm sure that's never happened to any of us.

[6 : 03] But you see, kids are to both obey and honor for their good. The promise that comes with the commandment is in verse three, that things may go well and that kids may enjoy a long life on the earth.

Now, we live in a fallen world with disease and so on. I don't think we need reminding of that over these past two years. And so there are exceptions to this promise in verse three.

But it does remain generally true because parents know what's best for their children, don't they? I know some kids find it hard to believe, but parents actually do know stuff.

For example, we know fruit and veggies are good for them. And so they are to obey when told to eat them. And if they obey, their bodies will generally be healthier and live longer.

And one day the kids will even thank us for it. Well, maybe. The point is they are to obey for it is right and for their good.

[7 : 17] Now, this command is to obey for kids still at home. Because in verse four, they're still being brought up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

And so I take it when children leave home, when they become independent adults, they don't have to obey. And parents can't expect them to.

I mean, just try telling your adult child with their own family how to cook a meal or how to do this or do that. And I bet it wouldn't go down too well, would it?

I know in Asian cultures, adult kids feel like they have to obey their parents even after they leave home. And the parents often expect this.

But it does change. However, we are to keep honoring our parents, giving them due respect, which I think our Western culture could do much better at.

[8 : 18] It was only a couple of years ago when a nurse at an aged care home told me that only half the residents were visited regularly by their family. Only half the residents.

That's so sad. But we're to keep honoring our parents, no matter how old we are. For one man I know, this meant calling his parents once a week just to see how they're going.

And he's now 55 years old. And it means caring for them, especially as you can see from 1 Timothy when they are widowed.

Looking after financially even. I've seen some great examples of this in our church where adult kids have cared for their parents who have sadly been widowed.

If your kids are like that for you, then thank God for them. And so young kids obey and all kids honor. And on the flip side, fathers are not to exasperate but nourish.

[9 : 26] So verse 4, fathers do not exasperate your children. Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. My kids were teasing me the other day because I lost that you know again.

And so I wish it said, children don't exasperate your fathers. But sadly, it doesn't say that. It says fathers don't exasperate your kids. But why are fathers singled out here?

Well, because of headship. Remember last week, the husband is the servant head. But also remember he was to use his headship to sacrificially serve for his wife's good.

And husbands will be held accountable for that. Well, similarly, fathers are to use our headship to serve sacrificially for our kids' good.

That they may live long on the earth. And especially live eternally in the new heavens and earth. And we will be held accountable for how we serve our kids in this.

[10 : 38] But given mothers are generally with the kids more, does this mean they have to wait for the fathers to, you know, finish their job to raise the kids?

Of course not. Our mothers can do things just as wives can do things last week. In fact, often mothers do more things, don't they? Rather, it means fathers are ultimately responsible.

And so if the father works, they are to still serve to support the mother. And when they finish work, we're to take an active role in raising the kids with the mother as a team.

Or some mothers might prefer to work. And so the father takes an even greater active role in raising the kids. Either way, fathers are ultimately responsible.

And they are especially to take the initiative in raising the kids as Christians. In the training and instruction of the Lord, as it says.

[11 : 39] I remember my dad would often say to us kids, do what your mother says. It was one of the ways he supported her. And when he wasn't working, he would talk to us, play games with us.

And he'd often take the initiative to read the Bible with us. Even when us kids tried to hide the Bible so we could miss out on dinner devotions.

What's more, he didn't exasperate us. The word exasperate here actually means to provoke to anger. Now, of course, kids will get angry when they're disciplined.

That's normal, isn't it? But this is talking about being so inconsistent that kids get confused and frustrated. Or so heavy-handed you drive the kids to anger.

Or belittling the kids and crushing them with criticism. So that they get discouraged and angrily defensive. I must confess, I'm a bit of a perfectionist.

- [12 : 45] And so I need to be careful to train my kids but not crush them with criticism. In fact, the word for bring up in verse 4 also means to nourish.
- Which speaks of a gentle feeding them for their good with the Christian faith. So instead of provoking to anger, we're to nourish in the faith.
- Especially as fathers, since we will be held accountable. So here are the principles of parenting. Here's wisdom for parenting.
- Kids obey and honour for your good. Fathers, with mother's help, don't provoke to anger but nourish in the faith. Of course, we want to know what to do in different situations.
- Like when to let kids watch particular movies. When to have a phone. When to have a boyfriend or girlfriend. And we're entering that stage now.
- [13 : 47] And yes, we can glean wisdom from other Christians. But how these biblical principles play out will vary between families.
- And even between each child. Because each child is different, aren't they? And that's okay. There's no one size fits all.
- No magic formula to produce little angels. Instead, we're to apply these principles as best we can.
- And it will involve trial and error. A whole lot of prayer. And hard work. After all, most things in life that are worthwhile require hard work, don't they?
- Pray for your kids to have a faith.
- [14 : 46] And to have Christian friends. Because let's face it, as kids grow older. They listen to their parents less. And their friends more, don't they? Pray even for a Christian spouse.
- If it's God's will, they get married. And pray for your wisdom and patience. Also, make the most of youth group and kids church.
- As you're able. You know, thanking for those leaders who partner with you in nourishing your kids in the faith. Especially these past two years.
- And if you're struggling, perhaps find someone you can pray with and exchange war stories with. Perhaps even stay off Facebook. Or as some people call it, brag book.
- You know, some parents put up these pictures of their kids, which is so idyllic. They can't possibly be true. And it makes you feel like a terrible parent. Or stay off that.
- [15 : 43] And remember, your worth is not based on your performance as a father or mother. It's based on being a child of God yourself.
- That's what gives us worth. And for those who aren't parents or don't have kids at home anymore. This still shows us how we might support those we know who do.
- Whether you're a friend of a parent or an auntie or an uncle or a grandparent. Now, yes, you have to be careful. Some grandparents have told me they've gotten in trouble before because they were told they were interfering when they were just trying to help out.
- So you do have to be careful. Parenting is a sensitive topic. But you can pray for those parents and kids yourself, can't you? You can even ask the parents how you can pray for them.
- You know, whether they're your adult kids or your brother or sister or a friend who's a parent. You can even ask the kids themselves how you might pray for them.
- [16 : 51] Or encourage them in the faith through birthday cards and Christmas presents. And if you're babysitting or on grandparent duty, you can ask what the rules are so that you're consistent with the parental rules.
- And not going to confuse the kids. What's more, as a church community, we can support one another, can't we? Single people can help families.

And families can include singles in their lives. And we can both help single parents who do it really tough, don't they? But this is what it means to walk wisely by the Spirit.

That children obey and honour. That fathers, with mother's help, don't provoke, but nourish in the faith. Well, more briefly is the second example of submission in our passage today.

So point to verse 5. Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.

[17 : 57] Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly as if you were serving the Lord, not people.

Because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are a slave or free. Now, I should point out here that the Bible does not promote slavery.

In fact, the Bible, as you can see on your screens there, encourages slaves to become free, to gain your freedom if they can. And not to become a slave if they're free.

But in the ancient family home, domestic slaves were very common. One source I read suggested about one third of the population were household slaves.

I mean, that's pretty big, isn't it? It was also different, though, to the African-American slavery that we're more familiar with. For starters, ancient slaves included people from all races, not just African-Americans.

[19 : 07] And also, many chose to become slaves as a form of employment, or because they had no home, and this would give them a home, shelter. But slaves were still slaves.

They were not free, but they were dependent on their masters for food and for shelter, just like kids. And so, like kids, Paul uses the word obey in verse 5.

But we're not slaves today, are we? And so, this applies a little differently to us. The closest parallel is to workers and bosses.

But workers are free to change jobs and masters, so to speak. And so, we don't have to obey like a slave.

Rather, it's more like voluntarily submitting, as we saw before, like we do at church in our various roles. What does still apply, though, is how we submit and work.

[20 : 15] We are to... So, if you go back a slide, Tim, to verse 5 to 8. So, we are to submit, verse 5, with respect and sincerity, as we would to Christ.

Whether, verse 6, they are watching or not. And we are to work, verse 7, wholeheartedly as those serving or working for Christ.

Knowing, verse 8, that the Lord Jesus will reward us, whether our boss does or not. In fact, you could summarize it all as working, conscious of Christ.

Because notice, if you go to the next slide, notice that every verse has a reference to Christ, the Lord.

Do you notice that? Every verse has a reference to Christ, who is our Lord, the capital M, Master. And if we work being conscious of Christ, it will shape how we work, won't it?

[21 : 28] We will work wholeheartedly and not lazily. We will work with sincerity, not insincerity. We will work with respect, not disrespect.

You know, not tearing down our boss with our colleagues at lunchtime, even if the boss deserves it. After all, the slaves Paul wrote to here were often mistreated much worse.

And they're still to respect their masters. Though, as workers today, we have legal avenues to report mistreatment and don't have to put up with it.

And like slaves did. But being conscious of Christ also frees us from feeling unappreciated or overlooked. Because we know our true boss in heaven sees how hard we've worked and will reward us.

It also frees us from feeling guilty if we don't keep working. At pre-COVID, I used to hear stories of how people in the offices in the city, they would leave their computers on when they went home.

[22 : 34] So their bosses would still think they were working. Because they were worried about not working enough. Well, being conscious of Christ frees us from that.

Because what matters is a clear conscience before our heavenly boss. And if our conscience is clear, if we know we've done enough work before Christ, then we're free from being able to go home without having to leave our computer on or pretend to keep working.

And being conscious of Christ will also help us to be a good witness in the workplace. And for us all, whether we are working or not, there's application here for how we serve Christ, isn't there?

As I said, every verse likens how we're to work for our little M master with how we're to serve our capital M master, Christ.

In other words, all these verses show us how to live as Christians, how to serve Jesus. And so are we serving Christ with sincerity and respect?

[23 : 47] Are we doing God's will from the heart? Are we serving Christ wholeheartedly, remembering he saved us and will reward us on the last day?

In fact, do we even think of Christ as our loving Lord that we ought to aim to please? Like workers, we are to submit and serve Christ as our perfect loving Lord.

It's a saying for masters, verse nine. See on your screens. Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them since you know that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven.

And there is no favoritism with him. The phrase in the same way, I think, refers to the same attitude. Now, being conscious of Christ, because if they are, then masters won't use threats, but they'll do good.

They'll treat slaves or in this case, bosses will treat their workers with respect and sincerity as they would Christ. In fact, they're to remember that Christ is their capital M master in heaven who will reward or judge because he does not show favoritism.

[25 : 10] He's not going to treat masters better than slaves. He's going to treat everyone equally and fairly. Which for earthly masters is a warning not to let their authority go to their head.

I know of one boss who claims to be a Christian and he actually mistreated one of our church members who worked for them. Even demanding our church member do work when he was in hospital recovering.

I couldn't believe it. This is a warning for that boss. But it's also a comfort for our church member, knowing that his earthly master will be held accountable by our heavenly master.

But also know of another church member who is a boss with his own business and he goes out of his way to care for his worker. He even pays his worker before he pays himself and sometimes buys his worker lunch during the week.

And when I heard this, I thought, I might even change jobs. I'll go work for this guy. But this is how to be an earthly master who walks wisely by the spirit.

[26 : 18] Well, I need to finish. There was a father in a supermarket trying to do some shopping while his son was screaming in the trolley. And the father was gently saying, calm down, George.

Not long to go, George. Hang in there, George. A lady in the same shopping aisle heard him and said, excuse me, sir. I know this is none of my business, but I just want to commend you for being so patient with young George here.

And the man replied, lady, I'm George. I'm George. I'm George. Whether it's raising kids or working in the workplace, both can be hard.

And there's all sorts of advice out there about how to do it. And so let's pray that God would help us to walk with his wisdom, with the help of his spirit when it comes to kids and work.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for your word, which gives us wisdom to walk wisely in this world.

[27 : 25] We thank you also for your spirit who gives us strength to do it. And so we pray that by your spirit, you would help us to walk wisely, particularly this morning when it comes to the topics of children and work.

Help us all, we pray, to serve Christ as we've seen in this passage too. We ask it all in his name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.